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ABSTRACT

The goals of this presentation were to help mental health professionals become more cognizant of cultural factors in the processes of death and grief and more introspect about their own personal and intercultural awareness of death, grief, and multiculturalism. Commonly reported counselor cultural biases are highlighted, as are factors to consider when providing competent cultural interventions. (GCP)

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Multicultural Death and Grief Awareness: An Intervention Tool

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- **GOALS OF WORKSHOP**
  - Become more cognizant of cultural factors in the processes of death and grief
  - Introspect about one's personal and inter cultural awareness of death, grief, and multiculturalism
  - Return home with more cultural sensitivity awareness
- **PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES OF THE WORKSHOP PRESENTER**
  - Retired School Psychologist With 28 Years Experience
    - Crisis intervention experiences include helping students, school staff, and relatives of the deceased after homicides, suicides, and accidental deaths.
  - American Red Cross Disaster Mental Health Volunteer since 1999
    - Disaster experiences include helping out after tornadoes, wildfires, floods, airline catastrophes, workplace shootings, and fires.
- **CULTURE AND THE ONE-WAY MIRROR**
  - "Culture is akin to being the observer through the one-way mirror; everything we see is from our own perspective. It is only when we join the observed on the other side that it is possible to see others and ourselves clearly--but getting to the other side of the glass represents many challenges" (Lynch, 1992, p. 35).
- **THE SIX CULTURAL BORDERS WITH CHECKPOINTS (Rina Chittooran's 2002 NASP workshop)**
  - **Self-Examination and Self-Awareness**: School psychologists need to introspect, to become aware of how their culture has socialized them, and to eliminate stereotypes and prejudices.

- **A Flexible and Open Attitude**: School psychologists need to maintain openness toward others and flexibility in thinking.
- **Phenomenology** : School psychologists need to try to open themselves to others' direct experiences, to see things through their eyes.
- **Awareness of Ethnocentrism**: School psychologists need to be conscious of how they perceive reality through their cultural lens and how interpreting reality only through their cultural perspective can impede multicultural interpersonal relationships.
- **Verbal and Nonverbal Cultural Communication:** School psychologists need to possess verbal skills such as active listening and nonverbal skills such as signs and symbols, chronemics, proxemics, silence, kinesics, haptics, paralanguage, clothing, and physical appearance.
- **Consciousness of Individuality Within Groups:** School psychologists need to recognize individual uniqueness within cultural groups.

➢ **THE TEN COMMONLY REPORTED COUNSELOR CULTURAL BARRIERS (Pedersen (1987)**

- **Normal Behavior Is Universal:** Normalcy is assumed to be the same in all societies, and it is not the case.
- **Emphasis on Individualism:** Counseling assumes the individual needs to change rather than changing the family or society.
- **Fragmentation by Academic Disciplines:** Different disciplines use artificial boundaries to separate themselves from each other, and this ultimately prevents interrelated discussions.

- **Dependence on Abstract Words:** Western culture, a low-context culture assumes that abstract concepts carry their own meaning. Some other cultures may be high-context and use the context to give a concept meaning.
- **Overemphasis on Independence:** Western society socializes the individual to be reliant and not dependent. Other cultures may stress dependencies as necessary and healthy.
- **Neglect of Client's Support Systems:** In Western cultures, counseling is formal. However, because formal counseling is not as accepted in some cultures, counselors need to mobilize family and peer support systems to help a client.
- **Dependence on Linear Thinking:** This is the belief that every effect has a cause. In some cultures, however, cause and effect are not considered as polarities but are viewed as two aspects of the same reality, such as Ying and Yang.
- **Focus on Changing Individual, Not System:** This is the assumption that counseling attempts to change the individual to fit into society instead of society changing to fit the individual.
- **Neglect of History:** Counselors concentrate on a client's immediate events to the neglect of past history.
- **Dangers of Cultural Encapsulation:** Counselors need to be aware of their closed, biased, and cultural perceptions of reality in order to relate openly to individuals from other cultures.

- **EIGHT FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN PROVIDING COMPETENT CULTURAL INTERVENTION (Ross, 1994)**
  - **Values:** All cultures must solve common human problems that include time, activity, relational orientation, person-nature orientation, and the basic nature of humankind.
  - **Concept of the family:** The family is defined differently across various cultures. It can be described narrowly or broadly.
  - **Religious beliefs:** Religions give meaning to the human conditions of life and death and can include myths, doctrines, ethical teachings, and rituals.
  - **Attitudes toward the body:** Culture determines how the body will be cared for and determines practices such as transfusions, transplants, amputations, autopsies, embalming, and cremation.
  - **Attitudes toward death:** Death is perceived differently. Some cultures believe that death is the end of one's life; others believe that it is the beginning of a new life.
  - **Bereavement, grief, and mourning practices:** Culture prescribes how individuals will outwardly display grief after loss.
  - **Funeral practices:** Practices during a funeral are prescribed variably across cultures.
  - **Communication:** Culture may socialize its members to be silent in conversation and in grief while others may condition their members to be expressive.

➢ DEATH, GRIEF, AND MULTICULTURAL AWARENESS EXERCISES

- **Death Awareness Introspective Exercise** (Answer the following questions)

- What was the first death that you can remember? What kind of death was it?

_____

_____

- What do you remember about your reactions to it? _____

_____

_____

- What was the most recent death that you can remember? What type of death was it? _____

_____

_____

- What were your reactions to it? _____

_____

_____

- As a school psychologist, what type of death would be difficult for you to cope with and would be a problem for your service delivery? _____

_____

_____

- Why would that kind of death affect you? _____

_____

_____

- **Grief Awareness Introspective Exercise** (Answer the following questions)

- Do you believe that children and adolescents grieve through linear, sequential stages? Explain. _____

_____

_____

- Should children be shielded from grief and death? Why or why not? _____

_____

_____

- Do children grieve like adults? Why or why not? _____

_____

_____

- When a student dies, should you move and remove his/her school desk from class? Explain. _____

_____

_____

- If a child experiences the presence of a loved one after the death, would you consider that a part of the expected grieving process? Why, or why not? _____

_____

_____

- After providing intervention during a school/community tragedy, would you, as a school psychologist, participate in a defusing or debriefing? Why, or why not?

_____

_____

- **Multicultural Awareness Introspective Exercise** (Answer the following questions)

- How many individuals from cultural, racial, or religious backgrounds very different from your own have you personally or professionally known who have died? Explain. _____

_____

- In relating to an individual from another culture, are you aware of how your expectations and biases may affect the relationship? If so, in what way? _____

_____

_____

- Do you prevent yourself from lumping together individuals from different ethnic minority groups, and are you aware of the important individual differences within each group and within each person within the group? Explain. _____

_____

_____

- When intervening as a school psychologist, do you avoid applying Western ethnocentric concepts to understand and help individuals from other cultures? Have you experienced this? If so, how? _____

_____

_____

- Are you aware of using culturally sensitive verbal and nonverbal communication? What experiences have you had? _____

_____

_____

- Are you cognizant of the meaning the culture applies to trauma, death, grief, and treatment? What intercultural experiences have you encountered? _____

_____

Note: The previous three Death, Grief, and Multicultural Awareness Introspective Exercises were constructed by this workshop presenter and were modeled after D. P. Irish, K. P. Lundquist, & V J. Nelsen's (Eds.) 1993 book, Ethnic Variations in Dying, Death, and Grief: Diversity in Universality, published by Taylor & Francis in Washington, DC.

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